In Daniel Levitin’s speech “How to stay calm when you know you'll be stressed,” he shows how under stress human brains have reduced cognitive function and decision making ability and some steps people can take to combat stress induced cloudy thinking. He begins his speech with a story of how he forgot his keys in his house, forcing him to break in through a window, and how in the following morning the stress of having had to break into his own house caused him to forget his passport. He then proceeds to explain how the cortisol in the brain produced by stress is a toxin that while helpful for fleeing a predator in the wild is not helpful for thinking through decisions. To combat this, Levitin proposes that people plan and structure their life to reduce the need for thinking during stressful events.

Although Daniel Levitin’s speech was well executed with good hand gestures and meaningful pauses, his use of the passport story in the beginning of the speech seems somewhat irrelevant or at the least ineffective. For me, I lose things daily regardless of how stressed I am or not, so the speaker opening with a story about losing his keys and later his passport does not seem relevant to me. Furthermore, even if it was, I think he could have used an example that would be more serious, such as forgetting to look both ways while crossing a street when under stress of work or something similar. However, this small issue is more than compensated for by his well-executed speech. His meaningful pauses were timed right when the audience was laughing and he seemed to read the crowd well enough to give just the right amount of time between sentences. Furthermore, his hand gestures held my attention and felt very natural and conducive to the content of the speech.

I agree with Levitin’s encouragement to embrace the stress in our lives and plan accordingly. At first, I thought that if stress induced brain fog was an issue, then people should work to reduce or even avoid stress in their daily lives. However, Levitin is right to point out that we will be faced with these issues whether we want to or not. For example, Levitin gave a hypothetical example of a person who goes to the doctor and is prescribed statin, a medicine to prevent some cardiovascular disease. If not prepared, the stress of the situation may cause the patient to just not think and take the medicine. On the other hand, had the patient thought before hand important questions such as, what percentage of people get side effects and what percentage gets any benefit from the drug, he or she would be able to make a more informed and therefore a better decision as to their health. In this situation, the patient had no choice but to decide either way. Therefore, the best solution would be to plan ahead and think through decisions that will be made during stressful events.

Overall, I think that the content of the message to plan out decision making combined with good hand gestures and good natural rhythm made Levitin’s speech not only enjoyable but also personally helpful. Although some might be quick to point out that most of Levitin’s speech is common sense, most people do not plan ahead as much as we should in decision making, especially for doctor appointments like the example given. Even if some people already did do some of the tips he suggested, his speech helps us remember that we are extremely ineffective at thinking during stressful events and that we cannot rely on our cognitive functions when a situation becomes stressful.